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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 003710

SIPDIS

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TAGS: IZ TU PREL MARR GR

SUBJECT: IRAQ-TURKEY-U.S. DECIDE TO ESTABLISH COORDINATING COMMITTEE IN BAGHDAD

REF: BAGHDAD 3598

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Classified By: PolMil Minister-Counselor Michael Corbin. Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) The November 19, Baghdad, Turkey/Iraq/U.S. security trilateral on combating the PKK resulted in an agreement to form a trilateral committee to be based in Baghdad within ten days to share intelligence and discuss operational coordination and also saw successful participation by KRG representatives in the GOI delegation. Although the Turkish delegation had hoped to be able to settle the last issue in the pending bilateral counter-terrorism agreement (hot pursuit by Turkish forces into Iraq), the GOI made clear this was not the forum to resolve this issue. Although unconvinced the trilateral committee mechanism would provide a practical means to combat the PKK, the GOT agreed after the meeting to work out modalities with the U.S. and Iraq for a committee in Baghdad. The GOI remains concerned about Turkish cross border operations and seeks to ensure Turkish overtures to the KRG are matched by engagement with Baghdad. We are engaging the Iraqis to push for rapid evidence of willingness to discuss practical steps in order to prevent the Turks from abandoning this promising means to include Baghdad in actions against the PKK. End Summary.

BROAD PARTICIPATION IN DELEGATIONS

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¶2. (SBU) As a result of the GOI initiative to engage Ankara in trilateral talks on combating the PKK (reftel), GOI Minister of State for National Security Affairs Shirwan al-Waeli hosted a meeting November 19 in Baghdad. The GOI delegation also included:

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs - Dr. Labid Abawi  
Director General, Dept. of Border Enforcement - LTG Muhsen Khalaf  
Military Intelligence Director - MG A'ala  
INIS Deputy Director - MG Faisal Doski  
MSNSA Political Advisor - Hamid Rashid  
KRG Minister of State for the Interior - Karim Al- Sinjari

¶3. (SBU) The following persons comprised the GOT delegation:

Minister of Interior - Besir Atalay  
Under Secretary, Ministry of the Interior - Yilmaz Arslan  
TGS Deputy J3 - MG Erdal Ozturk  
Foreign Policy Advisor to the PM - Ambassador Ahmet Davutoglu  
Under Secretary, National Intelligence Org'n - Fatma Afet Gunes

Turkish Ambassador to Iraq - Derya Kanbay  
Special Envoy for Iraq - Murat Ozcelik  
Minister Counselor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Inan  
Ozyildiz  
Second Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Can Oguz  
TGS - COL Cahit Armagan  
Defense Attach, Turkish Embassy - COL Cengiz Ozen  
Deputy Chief of Mission, Turkish Embassy - Sencer Yondem  
Political Officer, Turkish Embassy - Reyhan Ozgur

¶4. (SBU) The following persons comprised the U.S. delegation:

The Ambassador  
MNF-I CJ3 - MG Guy Swan  
Minister Counselor, Political-Military Affairs - Mr. Michael Corbin  
Deputy Counselor, Political-Military Affairs - Mr. Philip Kosnett  
Political-Military Affairs Officer - Mr. Patrick Connell  
Chief, MNF-I CJ3 Security Strategy Division - COL Rick Stockhausen  
Director, MNF-I CJ2 Strategic Intel. Engagement - COL Kent Critchlow  
MoD Liaison, MNF-I CJ3 Combined Operations - COL Robert Talbot-Rice

A COMMON GOAL: COMBATING A COMMON ENEMY

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¶5. (C) At the outset of the meeting, Minister of State for National Security (MSNS) Shirwan al-Waeili, noted how this meeting built on previous efforts and stated that the goals of the GOI included closing PKK headquarters in Iraq, Qof the GOI included closing PKK headquarters in Iraq, militarily confronting the PKK and "liquidating" camps that have served as "incubators" of terrorism. He couched his

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comments, however, with the awareness that the PKK operates in particularly difficult mountainous terrain and is "well equipped for terrorism." He reaffirmed Iraq's commitment to its bilateral agreements and international conventions on intelligence sharing.

¶6. (C) Head of the Turkish delegation, Minister of Interior Atalay began by discussing Turkish commitment to maintaining the "unity of Iraq." He noted the visit of PM Erdogan in July, 2008 - the first Turkish PM to visit Iraq in 18 years - as having set the stage for bilateral cooperation, saying: "we consider the problems of Iraq to be our problems, as well." Atalay expressed the desire of the Turkish government to see stability in Iraq.

¶7. (C) Atalay stated that terrorist operations on the border between Turkey and Iraq have increased, as has the PKK ability to receive "logistical support" from within Iraq. He bemoaned agreements of past years (2005, 2006) as having achieved little due to the "great suffering of Iraq" in those years and described that time-frame as one in which certain terrorist groups took advantage of the breakdown in security within the country. He expressed the GOT's hope that "Iraq will start paying attention to this problem, starting today, especially in the north" and praised the exchange of information that has already taken place between the U.S. and Turkey on the subject of the PKK.

¶8. (C) Atalay expressed his strong desire that the trilateral talks achieve tangible results in fighting the PKK. This, he saw as the main goal of the talks. He highlighted the presence of Kurdish representatives on the GOI delegation as indicative of a greater chance for achieving long-term results. He added that one example of cooperation was the bilateral intelligence exchange with the U.S. on the PKK. He hoped something similar could be done with Iraq.

¶9. (C) Near the conclusion of his opening remarks, MoI Atalay

commented on the 2007 meeting between him and the Iraqi Minister of Interior Bulani. He extolled their cooperation and their discussion on an agreement to combat terrorism, noting that only on Article Four was no consensus reached. (NOTE: Article Four deals with GOT's desire to obtain agreement for Turkish hot pursuit of PKK elements across the border into Iraq and calls for establishing a mechanism for doing so. End note.) Atalay stated that the mechanisms related to Article Four needed to be activated and said he had mentioned this in his meeting with the Prime Minister (where the Minister of Interior had been present) immediately prior to the trilateral talks. Atalay said that the Article Four issue was very important to Turkey and that the Turkish side very much wanted to finish the discussion on Article Four and to sign the Counter terrorism agreement at the trilateral talks.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador noted that the long history of alliance between Turkey and the United States and the newer alliance between the U.S. and Iraq were both of strategic importance. He noted the major improvement in the security capabilities of the GOI which provided the opportunity for real progress to combat the PKK. He highlighted that some issues needed to be dealt with in the trilateral context, while others were more properly considered in the realm of bilateral discussions. He added that the complex nature of the problem presented by the PKK required a complex responsive approach. Concluding, Ambassador commented on USG responsive approach. Concluding, Ambassador commented on USG satisfaction at the inclusion of KRG representatives in the GOI delegation and added that the U.S. has been, and will continue to be, a strong and committed partner to both Turkey and Iraq - especially, he said, as we join in common cause against our common enemy, the PKK.

#### IRAQ'S VIEW OF THE ISSUE

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¶11. (C) MSNS Waeili supported the U.S. suggestion that the trilateral dialogue was not the proper forum to resolve the bilateral Article Four issue, and highlighted the developing status of the Iraqi Armed Forces and the need for further infrastructure support in the North. He said that the Iraqi Army "could not conduct offensive operations against the PKK now - especially in very difficult areas - areas that were even difficult for Turkish troops." Saying the Iraqi troops were "not ready to attack; we don't have the capability now." He concluded that the Iraqi border forces would not be "completed" for another three years. In a less than subtle message to the GoT that its cross border operations will not be tolerated in Post-UNSCR Iraq, Waeili insisted that Iraq must maintain its sovereignty and said that this was critical

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to the central government.

¶12. (C) KRG Minister of State for the Interior Karim Al-Sinjari supported Waeili and added that all sides needed to work together to decrease terrorist activity. He highlighted some of the KRG efforts to diminish PKK activity, such as establishing checkpoints and trying to prevent use of KRG airports by PKK terrorists arriving from Europe although he noted most had to be returned to Europe if they had European passports and no outstanding warrants against them. He said that they had also closed PKK headquarters and were attacking PKK logistics networks and cooperating with the USG through MSNS Waeili. He said that the KRG was working with UNHCR and the International Office on Migration to address the Mahmur camp which served as a recruitment ground for the PKK. He added that the KRG did not permit PKK terrorists to use KRG hospitals or to freely move in the KRG - except for the impenetrable mountainous regions.

#### LIMITING PKK LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

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¶13. (C) A common theme of the Turkish side was the need to eradicate PKK logistical support lines existing within Iraq - which Minister Atalay termed "the greatest factor in the PKK's success." He also commented on the need to eliminate PKK ability to move into small, mountainous, Kurdish villages during winter months where they threaten residents and are thereby able to take refuge. He said that these items raised the specter of the need for greater local control over the borders.

ONE COMMITTEE OR TWO?

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¶14. (C) Waeli suggested a framework for follow-up action by the trilateral mechanism. He said the PKK was an illegal organization which must not be allowed to threaten Iraq or Turkey. He proposed a trilateral committee in Baghdad to focus on intelligence sharing and cooperation on operational matters.

¶15. (C) GOI Department of Border Enforcement (DBE) Commander LTG Muhsen Khalaf proposed establishing a border coordination group in the North. He raised the problem of areas the PKK controlled along the border and the need for information sharing in an effort to combat these. Minister Waeili proposed a "smaller group made up of border commanders and people they trust along with an officer on the Turkish side to receive urgent information regarding the dangers and threats in border areas."

¶16. (C) Khalaf's comments prompted MoI Atalay to state his opposition to establishing committees which would result in nothing tangible. He said the Turks wanted to discuss quick practical steps and said a plan was needed to expedite the process. If a committee is established, he said, it must have a "very fast working plan." Intelligence sharing should be continuous and preferably should be conducted under the bilateral intelligence agreement which he hoped could be addressed on this visit.

¶17. (C) The MoI was followed by Turkish MG Erdal Ozturk who assured that the PKK areas in the north of Iraq are well known to the GOT. "Everyone knows where they are," he said. He acknowledged that information sharing is now going on, but asked what else could be done to eliminate the PKK. He called on greater support from the ISF in 2009.

¶18. (C) Minister Atalay highlighted the border agreements Turkey struck with Greece. Calling them "fruitful and productive," he said that Turkey should do the same with you (Iraq), you, who matter even more to us."

¶19. (C) After considerable back and forth between the GOT and the GOI, the Ambassador suggested there were two proposals: one, for mechanisms to be established in northern Iraq in which Turkish and Iraqi officials with direct responsibility for the borders would come together to exchange information and coordinate operations; the second, for a committee, or sub-committee, based in Baghdad to focus on operational issues, which would function as a standing-committee with permanent LNOs. Minister Waeili agreed and said that he envisioned the group meeting every two months to evaluate the performance that would be agreed upon in the subcommittee. He said that the KRG as well as MNF-I and the Embassy should be represented on this committee, which would be headquartered in Baghdad.

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¶20. (C) The Ambassador noted the consensus that both sides agreed to the formation of a committee. What remained, therefore, was to discuss at what level the committee should operate and who should be represented on it. The Ambassador suggested that the three nations be represented by their respective militaries at the Brigadier or Major General level

and suggested modalities be worked out to clarify the mission and ensure the committee be linked to the operational forces who conduct operations.

#### A MECHANISM IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

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¶21. (C) Minister Atalay stressed the need for a mechanism to enable the proposed committee to function and asked how information would be exchanged. Minister Waeili suggested that the mechanism be determined by the committee itself in its first meeting. Atalay told Waeili he wished to ensure that action would be taken on actionable intelligence as quickly as possible. Particularly if, as Waeili readily admitted, the ISF was not capable of responding. "Who will do this intervention?" he asked. "If you can't do it in a certain time, you can approach us and ask us to do it - either country can do it. That's what I'm most worried about."

¶22. (C) Deciding to turn to the final communique, the Turks cut considerably a draft proposed by Waeili that contained references to protection of Iraqi civilians along the border, and a call to ensure Iraq's sovereignty and the need for the parties to "abide by international norms and agreements concluded between the Turkish and Iraqi sides." Ultimately, the GOI agreed to remove these sections.

After much discussion agreement was reached to set up a trilateral committee in Baghdad within 10 days to begin work on coordinating intelligence and operational considerations in order to better combat the PKK.

¶23. (U) Text of the Final Statement of the Trilateral Meeting is as follows:

In the framework of continuous coordination and consultation, and in accordance with the principle of common concerns over the PKK threat to the security and integrity of the Republic of Iraq and the Republic of Turkey, the three parties held a Trilateral Security Committee meeting encompassing Iraq, Turkey and the United States. The trilateral meeting was held in Baghdad on 19/11/2008, and after the submission of a comprehensive assessment on the risks of the PKK, and how it should be dealt with the conferees agreed:

First - The PKK is a terrorist organization whose activities threaten the security and integrity of both Iraq and Turkey.

Second - To work together to establish a joint sub-committee to exchange intelligence and to coordinate security measures to combat the PKK, the modalities of which will be determined within ten days.

Third - The Main Committee will conduct meetings every two months to assess the work of the sub-committee in line with the interests of the parties concerned.

#### COMMENT

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¶24. (C) Despite the misunderstanding on the possibility of concluding the bilateral counterterrorism agreement during the visit (likely encouraged by amateur members of Waeili's staff) the trilateral security discussions saw KRG reps participate in a unified GOI delegation on the sensitive issue of combating the PKK. The GOI seeks GOT recognition that Baghdad has a say in KRG-Turkish cooperation and as long as the Turks do not become frustrated if there is no tangible result from this mechanism, all sides may be able to maintain their cooperative relationships. We will work with Turkish Special Envoy Ozcelick who stayed behind in Baghdad to work on the U.S.-Iraq Security agreement (SEPTEL) and the Turkish Embassy to try and ensure quick action on forming a committee in Baghdad.

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